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Developments in Indochina

State Dept. review
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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA*(Information as of 1500)*Page

CAMBODIA

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The arrest of Sirik Matak adds a new dimension to the fragile political structure in Phnom Penh. The insurgents are putting heavy pressure on government positions along the east bank of the Mekong.

LAOS

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The deadline for the formation of a new coalition government has been postponed. Rightist general Kouprasith says he plans no coup for the moment.

SOUTH VIETNAM

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The situation is easing at Tonle Cham. A new occupied SA-2 site near Khe Sanh showed up in photography [redacted] Opposition senators made a poor showing in their effort to debate the presidential decree on political parties. [redacted]

[redacted] UN Secretary General Waldheim has backed off from any Viet Cong representation at the UN.

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CAMBODIA

Matak's Arrest

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The detention of Sirik Matak may have far reaching political consequences. Matak is apparently still confined to his home in Phnom Penh, although the number of troops guarding him has been substantially reduced.

Matak, however, has said he had no intention of leaving voluntarily. In discussing the present situation with family members, Matak stated that only two groups could save the country--"the military and the Americans."

There are no signs as yet that the regime's crackdown has generated any undue agitation in the military, although some army officers are genuinely concerned about the over-all situation in Cambodia.

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The present situation raises some disturbing questions concerning Phnom Penh's already fragile political structure. The succession problem, which could have been resolved by Matak's installation as vice-president, is now more than ever a major problem.

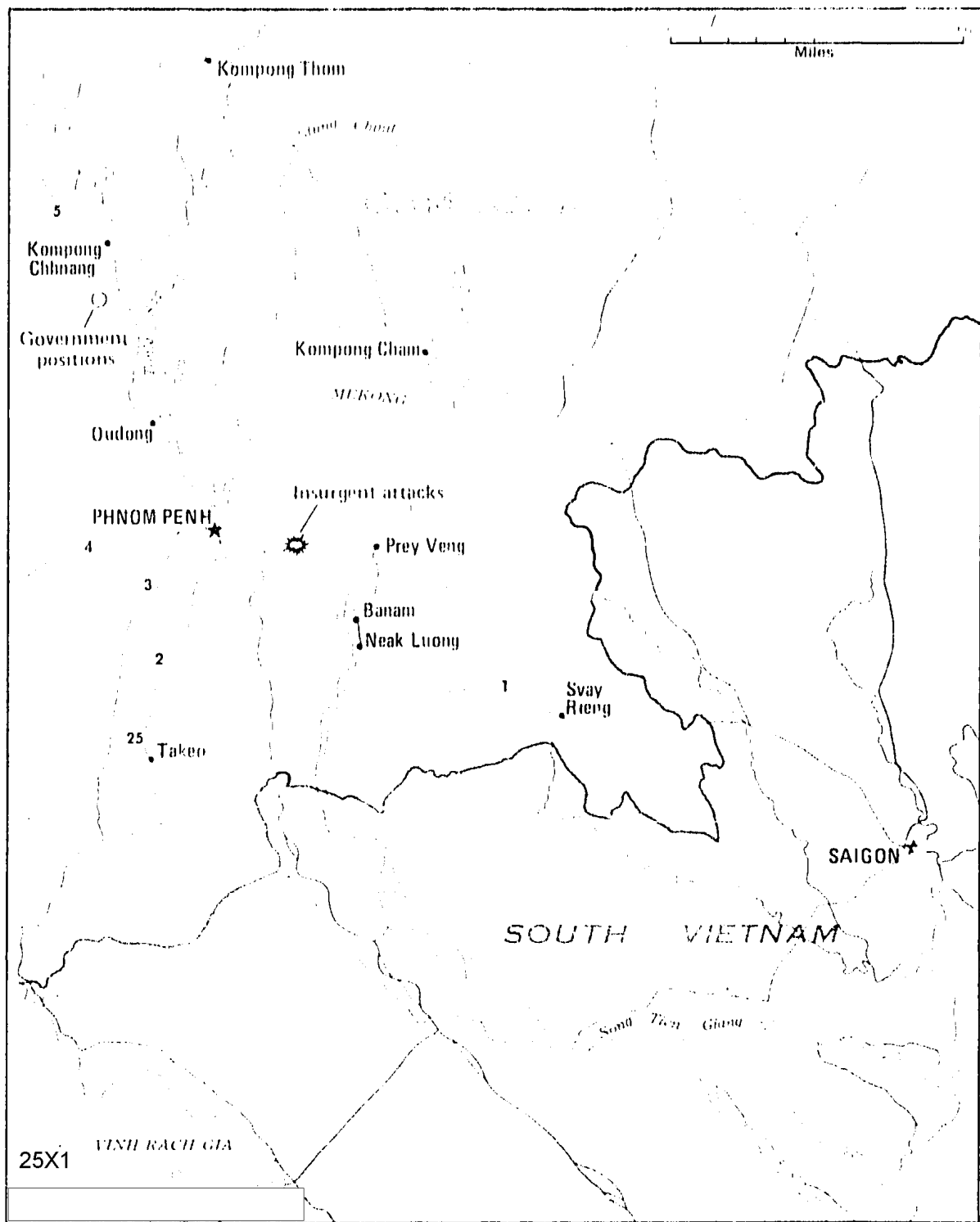
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In any event, Lon Non's influence over Lon Nol appears to be at an all-time high. Moves against other prominent civilian and military officials on Lon Non's black list cannot be ruled out.

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The Military Situation

The Khmer insurgents are continuing to put heavy pressure on several government positions along the east bank of the Mekong River about 25 miles north of Neak Luong. Government forces, supported by naval craft, have so far repulsed the attacks. The insurgents apparently are attempting to intercept a cargo ship that ran aground in that area on 20 March. Some 15 miles north of Neak Luong, government forces have regained control over both banks of the river, but some fighting is still going on along Route 1, about five miles north of the town.

In the northwest, enemy elements have surrounded four government positions along Route 5 about ten miles south of Kompong Chhnang City. At last report, the government troops were holding their ground, but the highway was still closed.

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LAOSThe Political Situation

The two sides have postponed the formation of a new coalition government beyond the deadline of 23 March set by last month's peace agreement. The senior Communist negotiators left Vientiane on 22 March, apparently for new strategy sessions at their headquarters near Sam Neua.

The agreement signed last month remains in effect, however, and there is no sign that either side is preparing to resume combat. The government press release indicated that negotiations would resume next week and that agreement on a new government might quickly follow.

The Communists may be stalling on the Laos talks while they assess prospects for implementation of the Vietnam accords. One effect of the delay is to set back the timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops and the release of prisoners. Under the terms of the peace agreement, both must be completed within 60 days after a new coalition government has been formed. The Pathet Lao position is that the release of US prisoners will be governed by the Lao agreement rather than the Vietnam accords.

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[REDACTED]

Army leaders and rightists are still rankled at the peace agreement negotiated by Souvanna in February, but they appear to accept for the moment the futility of further opposition. They are nevertheless concerned that the rightist position in Vientiane might quickly erode once a coalition government is formed. Kouprasith's threat to move against a future government if the Communists grow too strong is an attempt to impress these misgivings on US officials. [REDACTED]

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SOUTH VIETNAMThe Military Situation

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Communist pressure against the Tonle Cham Ranger camp appears to have eased for the moment. North Vietnamese shelling on 21 and 22 March was about half that of the previous day, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the camp's defenders aided by heavy tactical air and gunship support, repulsed a regiment-sized Communist attack on 20 March.

South Vietnamese armor and infantry elements met little enemy resistance during their relief operation to Rach Bap. The US Embassy reports, however, that villagers had complained about the heavy artillery used in support of the relief efforts. The villagers apparently fear that the Communists will respond by shelling Ben Cat and other centers in the region.

There has been some increased fighting in the western delta near the Cambodian border. Most of the activity has stemmed from units of the North Vietnamese 1st Division and some independent outfits attempting to move across the border into South Vietnam. [REDACTED]

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25X1Communist Air Defense Developments

Photography [REDACTED] confirms a new, occupied SA-2 site southeast of Khe Sanh in Quang Tri Province. The site, [REDACTED]

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is situated about a half mile east of the sites built earlier and now unoccupied. Visible in the new photography are at least two launchers, complete with SA-2 missiles, along with various radar and electronic support equipment.

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Focus on Presidential Decree

Opposition forces fared poorly at the special Senate session called on 21 March to debate the presidential decree on political parties. Only 31 senators showed up, and some of those abstained from voting on two resolutions critical of the government. Neither of the two resolutions received a majority. According to the US Embassy, the debate requested by the opposition several weeks ago was an anti-climax. Critics of the government, particularly the Senate's Catholic faction, were reluctant to speak out strongly during this time of uncertainty.

With the deadline next week for existing parties to meet the terms of the presidential decree, some Saigon politicians are still maneuvering to form workable alliances. The Farmer-Worker Party, the Progressive Nationalist Movement, a Vietnamese Nationalist Party faction, various Hoa Hao and Cao Dai factions, and a Catholic splinter group agreed to form the Social Democratic Alliance. The Alliance

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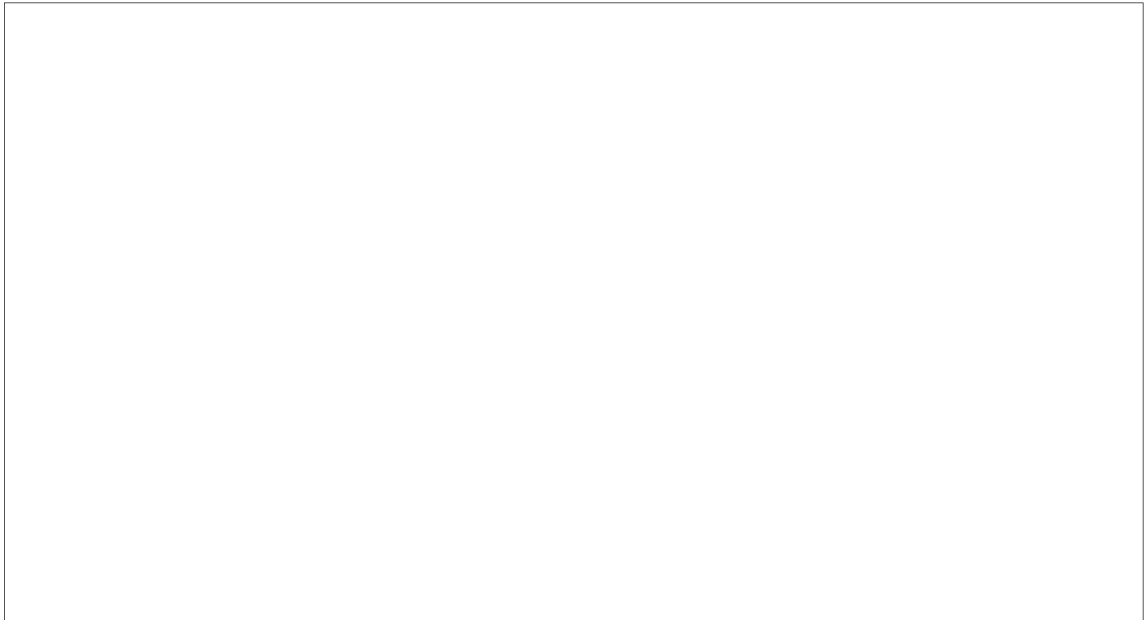
apparently will be a loose one and, if it is to have any chance of meeting the stiff terms of the decree, it will have to overcome internal rivalries.

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PRG Representation in UN not Imminent

UN Secretary-General Waldheim appears to be backing away from establishing a Viet Cong representation at the UN. He told US officials on 21 March that PRG Foreign Minister Binh's recent statement on observer status for the Viet Cong at the UN was "entirely on her own and an obvious means of getting some publicity." He said he had not talked with Madame Binh since the Paris Conference, and the matter of PRG representation would "remain under study."

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